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ABSTRACT

The "pioneers" of the alternative school movement (schools that have now been in existence from two to five years) have experienced many difficulties in putting their ideas into practice. This report contains a discussion of a conference that focused on the difficulties that have been encountered in involving students, staff, and parents in decisionmaking. Participants at the conference, drawn from many and varied kinds of alternative schools, attempted to develop generalizations about shared decisionmaking that might be of use to other alternative schools. The report contains many of these generalizations and discusses other problems facing alternative schools. (JF)

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Decision-Making in Alternative Secondary Schools

Report from a National Conference

May 25, 1972

Conference Sponsors:

UNESCO
Paris, France

Center for New Schools
Chicago, Illinois

Report Prepared By:

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This report is the result of concentrated cooperative work by the 31 people who attended the national "Conference on Decision-making in Alternative Schools" in February 1972 held at the Woodstock Center in Woodstock, Illinois. Their contributions to the conference, based on diverse experiences in alternative schools, should strengthen other schools that can learn from both their successes and their problems. The participants were:

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The outstanding work of these individuals has made this useful report possible. Naturally, Center for New Schools, which prepared the report, takes full responsibility for its content.

The Conference is especially grateful to Paul Coste and to UNESCO for providing ideas, encouragement, and financial support that made this meeting possible.

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I. Introduction: The Current State of Alternative High Schools

Center for New Schools began planning for the recent conference on decision-making in alternative secondary schools based on an analysis of the current state of the alternative school movement. This perspective was generally shared by the individuals who attended the conference.[1]

At the present time, the number of alternative schools is increasing at a tremendous rate, both inside and outside the public schools. The alternative school has become the latest educational fad, which is in the process of being marketed for mass consumption.

At the same time, the "pioneers" of the current alternative school movement (schools that have now been in existence for two or five years) have experienced severe difficulties in putting many of their ambitious ideas into practice. With respect to the goal of involving students, staff, and parents in decision-making, the types of difficulties that have been encountered will be analyzed in detail in Section IV. Some general patterns that run through many specific problems experienced by alternative schools should be clarified briefly, however, to help the reader understand the frame of reference for the conference.

Many of the alternative high schools represented at the conference were formed primarily as a reaction against the inhumanity of the conventional school. As one teacher

[1] Needless to say, it was not shared by everyone at the conference. In summarizing generally shared view points that we emerged from the conference, we will omit the constant qualification of statements with phrases like "Most participants felt that....", "While a few people disagreed,....", etc. When there was substantial disagreement on a point, we will describe the differing opinions presented.

put it, "We were a lot more certain about what we were against than what we were for." Thus, people tried to build their schools as the opposite of everything the traditional school stood for. In planning sessions, the argument "That's just like the old school" or "Take attendance! That's just what the old school does." usually carried the day. Alternative schools have since discovered that you can't build a new community merely by opposing everything the old one stands for. The need to develop positive alternative practices has become apparent.

Coupled with the unsuccessful attempt to build an alternative learning community as the negation of traditional schools has been a misplaced in "natural organic growth" as the solution to all problems. People began with the belief that once they were freed from the restrictions of the conventional school, once people could relate to each other "openly and naturally", a beautiful new learning community would emerge. Again, the difficulties with this approach as it relates to decision-making will be spelled out in detail in Section IV. In general, four problems have been encountered:

1. Even when teachers and students leave traditional schools, they still bring with them their past experiences, attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses. These characteristics often emerge in the new situation rather than some "natural" man or woman. For example, one serious weakness of teachers and students in alternative schools has been their limited capacity to work cooperatively, which can be traced, we feel, to the very limited preparation for cooperative action in the American culture.
2. Alternative schools have discovered that certain functions (for example, the counseling of students about options available in the program) must be carried out

for the school to survive and to reach its goals, and that there are only a limited number of approaches that can be used to carry out these functions effectively. This reality implies careful planning and training to achieve desired goals. It conflicts with the idea that good ways of doing things will emerge naturally and spontaneously, that "anything that happens is the best possible thing that could have happened."

3. Unstructured "natural" development puts tremendous strains on participants. It produces exhaustion and a high rate of attrition on alternative school staffs. Many alternative school staffs have turned over completely in a period of two to three years.

4. Many values and approaches that have been dubbed "natural" by the initiators of alternative schools reflect, in reality, the particular world-view of the American white middle class. For example, the privileged social position of middle class hip students allows them to down grade the importance of making a living, learning to read, etc. This class-biased viewpoint is dangerously misleading in developing an educational program for an alternative school that serves other than privileged white students.

These shortcomings have recently become clear to many individuals working in alternative schools, and they are trying to refine and alter their approaches to deal with these realities without losing sight of their original goals.

Most alternative schools began in relative isolation from each other. Within the past two years, however, many have had a chance to share their experiences at conferences, through visits to other schools, etc. Through this contact, they have discovered surprising

similarities in the specific ways in which they had tried to do things and in the results of these efforts. For example, many schools initially tried to govern themselves with some type of community meeting, but the community meeting approach disintegrated when people became frustrated and stopped attending.

This similarity of experience was especially surprising to alternative school people because of another widely-shared initial belief. It has been widely assumed that each school would develop a unique learning community based on the particular set of people and circumstances in its local situation. The surprisingly similar patterns of development observed in alternative schools (including serious problems that constantly recur in schools at certain stages of development) suggest that alternative schools must begin to learn from each other's successes and failures if they are to become a viable option for a significant number of students. Such productive sharing of experience is extremely rare at this point. Schools started within the past year are still learning little from the experience of existing schools. They are beginning with the same set of deceptively simple ideas that have drained the energies of their predecessors. The rapid expansion of alternative schools at the present time further decreases the chances for a healthy alternative school movement to develop. If the history of previous educational fads provides any clues, mass marketing of alternative schools will mean further dilution of their original goals and ideas and the development of alternative programs under conditions that will increase their liklihood of failure.

In attempting to alter this likely chain of events, many within the alternative school movement see the necessity for schools to begin to learn from each other's experience. The alternative school movement needs to develop a "tradition" that will allow a greater percentage of schools to survive and to reach their amibtious goals. This tradition should spell

out in great detail those approaches to developing a healthy learning community that work. It should warn people away from mistakes of the past. This pressing need to share alternative school experience was the stimulus for the conference on decision-making.

II. Rationale and Structure for the Conference

In the past two years, many people working in alternative schools have had the chance to share experiences on a wide range of topics. One such opportunity was a conference of six alternative high schools held in Philadelphia in June 1971, hosted by Saul Yanofsky of the Pennsylvania Advancement School and supported by UNESCO. Such meetings convinced those who attended that there were many common threads in their experience and that they needed to share their common experiences systematically with each other and to somehow communicate with additional alternative schools, including those just starting. One idea that was suggested to help achieve this objective was to hold a series of meetings focused on specific crucial topics in alternative school development.

Subsequent conversations and correspondence between Paul Coste of UNESCO, Bob Schwartz of Adams High School in Portland, and Center for New Schools resulted in the "Conference on Decision-Making in Alternative Secondary Schools." Decision-making was selected as a topic for the first focused conference because shared decision-making has been an important objective of many alternative schools and because many problems have been encountered in putting the idea of shared decision-making into practice.

Center for New Schools took responsibility for selecting participants, for establishing the format for the conference, for making administrative arrangements for the conference, and for leading initial conference groups. One important decision that was made was to develop a working conference focused specifically on decision-making in which an important goal was to develop generalizations that might be of use to other alternative schools. Thus, the Center pressed conference participants to record and analyze their experiences and to

see themselves as a working group that was developing some useful ideas that could be communicated to others, not merely sharing experiences for the primary benefit of those actually in attendance. Three methods were used to record information:

1. In questionnaires distributed before the conference and as part of the working sessions on the first day, participants recorded information about their schools, the history of decision-making at their schools, and specific examples of their involvement in decision-making.
2. Notes were taken on all conference sessions.
3. Participants were asked to write position papers and other commentaries based either on the work of a group of participants or on their own individual ideas.

Other considerations that went into the conference planning were as follows:

1. Diversity of Participants: Starting with the assumption that those who attended should have had extensive direct experience in alternative schools, we attempted to bring together a group that would be diverse in terms of region of the country, type of school, race, sex, and role in the school. The participants are listed at the beginning of this report. Some basic characteristics of the schools that were represented are listed in Appendix A.
2. Balance between pre-planning and participation in decision-making by those in attendance. The Center clarified the overall goals of the conference and planned and led the activities on the first day. At that point, a steering committee of conference participants was elected to set up those activities for the second and third day that could best meet the conference's objectives.

3. Conducive conference setting. To promote uninterrupted discussion among participants, the Woodstock Center was selected as the site for the three-day conference. Woodstock Center, operated by the Sylvia and Aaron Scheinfeld Foundation, was specially designed for small conferences. It is located in a rural section of Illinois 60 miles from Chicago.

4. Working papers. To help provide an initial focus for the conference two case studies of decision-making in alternative schools were prepared. "Student Involvement in Decision-making in an Alternative High School" by Steve Wilson of Center for New Schools focuses on Metro High in Chicago. "Decision-making at Adams: Confessions of an Ex-Principal" by Bob Schwartz focuses on Adams High in Portland, Oregon. Both are available from Center for New Schools.

A more detailed outline of the conference format, together with the main results of a conference evaluation, are presented in Appendix B.

III. The Importance and Scope of the Decision-making Issue in Alternative Schools

Among the initiators of alternative schools, emphasis on the need for shared decision-making has been justified partly because it is intended to help the student become more active in decision-making in later life. Students can hardly be expected to become active and independent in shaping their life as adults, the arguments runs, unless they help shape their lives in childhood and adolescence. However, alternative schools do not see education during adolescence merely as preparation for later life; they view widespread involvement in school decision-making as having several immediate benefits. The initiators of alternative high schools have generally felt that alienation and disintegration within the conventional high schools result to a large extent from authoritarian top-down organization that leaves both staff and students largely powerless in shaping important decisions that affect their lives. Thus, the effort to develop a shared approach to decision-making has been considered vital both as a basic precondition for a viable learning community and as a means for preparing students to become more active decision-makers in later life.

In some schools, the initial commitment to shared decision-making has been considered the primary objective of the whole venture. Thus, staff has been willing to endure high levels of disorganization and sometimes to risk total collapse of the school program trying to develop an effective procedure for shared decision-making (or waiting for one to emerge).

However, even if decision-making had not been such a salient initial concern for alternative school people, it would have inevitably become a central concern. Research

on organizations of all types emphasizes the central role of making, implementing, and monitoring decisions in the survival and effectiveness of organizations. Thus, the attempt to create an alternative school automatically involves staff, students, parents, and others in issues related to decision-making.

In thinking about the range of decision-making issues that arise in an alternative school, it is useful to start with a rough classification of three different levels of decisions:

Level of Decision	Example
Individual	Student decides where to eat lunch.
	Teacher or student feels someone needs to stop people from throwing junk on the floor and begins to talk with people about this.
	Student chooses a course schedule for himself from the school's catalogue.
	Student decides he wants to develop an individual placement for himself and pursue it.
	Teacher decides to help a student obtain an abortion.
	Director decides that for the sake of efficiency all the locks on students' lockers must be combination locks and that all combinations must be on file.
Group	Students decide with a teacher on mutual responsibilities in working on a particular project.
	A group of students who are close friends decide to take a weekend camping trip and get a teacher to go along.
	A group of students who are friends begin to plan a semi-formal dance for the school on its second anniversary.

Institutional	Even though there is a rule set up by the community council about not bringing drugs into the school, most students feel its OK if you're careful.
	Selection committee decides who will teach at the school the following year.
	All-school meeting decides that people have a responsibility to attend classes they chose at the beginning of the year.
	Community council decides that people shouldn't hang around the lobby of the building and asks teachers to enforce this rule.

All three levels of decision-making were discussed at the conference, but the major emphasis was on institutional decision-making. The sharing of experiences among conference participants revealed several common patterns for the development of institutional decision-making that had been reinacted at most schools represented at the conference. Typically, the initiators of the school began with a commitment to democratizing their governing and policy-making, committing much time and emotional energy to the full discussion of issues to be decided. Most schools attempted to involve both students and staff in this process; in some, the emphasis was primarily on involving staff. The forum for this democratic process was a whole-community or whole-staff meeting, in which the attempt was made to decide all important policy questions. Two major factors limited the effectiveness of this approach. The first was the extreme difficulty of making policy in a large meeting. The second was the limited interest many students had in becoming involved in decision-making once the petty rules of the traditional school (e.g. dress code, hall passes, etc.) had been eliminated.

Typically, the all-community meeting was soon characterized by poor attendance and short tempers. At the same time, problems crucial to the school's survival and effectiveness were generally reaching a crisis stage. The need for an alternative approach to decision-making became apparent. This second stage could take one of several forms. The most common pattern seems to be for the staff to slowly take over the bulk of decision-making activity, with a few interested students continuing to take part in staff deliberations. Staff meetings and staff committees thus became the locus of decision-making. In some schools where staff assumed the major decision-making role, the majority of the staff remained involved. In others, a few administrators or teachers began to make most decisions.

In a few schools, the second stage has maintained significant student and parent involvement in governance by creating a governing board or committee system where certain positions must be filled by students and/or parents.

Whatever the specific structure for governance in the second stage, it reflected a narrowing of the number of students, staff, and parents actively involved in decision-making. Responsibility had, in fact, been delegated or assumed by a subset of the total school community.

Saul Yanofsky suggested that this second stage requires three basic conditions to make it work:

1. General agreement regarding the basic goals and priorities of the institution.
2. A high level of trust, so that people no longer feel they have to be personally involved in every decision.
3. A communications system that effectively receives suggestions and complaints from

the community and feeds back information on decisons reached and action that is expected from community members.

If these conditions are not present, he suggests, the school will enter a third stage. It is characterized by constant complaining by staff and students, low morale, non-compliance with decisions made by the governing group and statements of indifference about the fate of the school ("I don't care what they do; I'm just going to teach English" or "I'm just going to get my credits and get out of here."). It is difficult for a school to function effectively and sometimes to survive in this third stage. It is also extremely difficult to pull out of it.

This analysis is of course over-simplified, but it will provide a framework for the complexities that will be analyzed in the next section. Despite the over-simplified nature of this model, one should not lose sight of the surprising similarity in the patterns of development observed in alternative schools with respect to decision-making. The direction of "organic, natural" development is, in fact, highly predictable, and these predictable results make the ambitious goals of alternative schools very difficult to achieve.

IV. Some Specific Problems and Some Suggestions

This section presents the major results of the conference discussions. Several points should be kept in mind in reading and applying these ideas. First, we have been selective in presenting issues and ideas that were discussed. There are over 250 pages of typed and hand-written notes and comments from the conference, many containing ideas and arguments that would have to be greatly elaborated to make sense to someone who was not present. Rather than attempting to cover 60 or 70 different issues in highly condensed form, we have chosen several that seem most central. Second, since people divided into work groups, the positions taken on specific issues may not reflect the ideas of everyone present. The reader should assume that there was some disagreement and qualification of every statement that is presented. Third, conference participants were tentative in many of their statements, particularly those about different ways of coping with the problems they have experienced. Thus, no one sees these comments as the last word on any issue, We hope rather that they will be taken seriously as a starting point for thinking about ways that decision-making in alternative schools can be strengthened.

The Ingredients

As we indicated in Section I, the development of decision-making in alternative schools is strongly influenced by the initial attitudes and skills of both staff and students. The development of decision-making is also influenced by what we've called the institutional context. The relationship between decision-making and each of these three dimensions--student attitudes, staff attitudes, and the institutional context--was discussed extensively at the conference.

Student attitudes about decision-making: The attempt to involve students in decision-making in alternative schools has run into many difficulties. One of two working papers prepared for the conference was a case study of Metro High School, entitled "Student Involvement in Decision-making in an Alternative High School". Most participants felt that the conclusions reached in this analysis of a particular school closely reflected their own experiences in attempting to involve students in decision-making. Because of the general relevance of this study, the participants recommended that it be carefully considered by other alternative schools. One important theme of the Metro study that was widely discussed at the conference were the initial attitudes about involvement in decision-making that students brought to alternative schools as a result of their past experience. Without attempting to repeat the detailed analysis in the Metro study, we have listed below some points concerning students' attitudes about decision-making that are typical of the schools represented at the conference.

1. Coming from regimented traditional schools, the students' major initial concern in the alternative school was to gain autonomy in areas touching their daily personal lives (e.g. freedom of movement, dress, expression, association). Since alternative schools began by granting freedom in these areas, the interest of the majority of students in other areas of decision-making (e.g. curriculum) was extremely limited. Thus, a common pattern was the attempt by staff to think of ways of involving students in decision-making to which the students generally responded with indifference.

   Example: After an attempt to involve students in decision-making through all-school meetings failed, staff members encouraged students to form a representative government. Most students were indifferent to the idea but went along with the

selection procedure for the government. The students elected met once, and never set a time for a second meeting.

2. Students generally saw their most desirable role in decision-making not in terms of developing detailed programs and carrying them out, but in terms of bringing problems to the attention of the staff (of griping to the staff) and then turning the responsibility for formal decisions and action over to them.

   Example: As one student put it, "What you got to do is to make decisions. Then if we don't like it, we'll let you know. You do something and we'll react. Students don't dig sitting in meetings and stuff."

3. One of the deterrents to the development of a formal mechanism for students participation in government was the students' strongly negative experiences with student governments in their old schools. Staff and those students pushing student involvement were never successful in communicating an alternative image of what a government could be to the majority of students.

   Example: Some students interested in sports were talking informally, expressing dissatisfaction that their alternative school didn't set aside money for sports equipment. An observer asked why they didn't start some sort of student government. The students group agreed that student governments never do anything except make rules and front for the administration.

4. Closely related to students' distrust of governmental structures, school-wide policies, etc. was a personal ethic that can be summarized by two current cliches: "do your own thing" and "hang loose." Many students saw the ideal community as one with no government, where everyone would do his/her own thing and all disputes would

be settled informally. This made it difficult to arrive at broad community understandings and to carry them out even when there was verbal assent to them. The hang loose ethic glorifies reacting to the feeling of the moment and opposes planning, rules, and structured meetings. Hanging loose further weakens any attempt to create an organized means for making and carrying out decisions. Example: In a community meeting, students agreed that everyone had a responsibility to attend the classes they had chosen and that students would talk to each other about going to class. In practice, students found it impossible to confront their friends in enforcing this understanding.

5. Students' attitudes about involving themselves in decision-making varied between student subgroups. Generally, those involved in decision-making in an alternative school are hip white middle class students, whose concerns do not represent the concerns of other student subgroups (e.g. white and black working class students). Example: Through four different schemes for student involvement in governance, a group of 10 students in 350 were always the ones who remained involved. They were mostly white hip students unrepresentative of the students as a whole. For example, many students in the school were interested in having a football team and cheerleaders, but the hip students who were most salient in decision-making meetings thought these activities were corny.

These students orientations to decision-making contribute strongly to the typical patterns of development sketched in Section II. They are the forces that act "naturally and organically" to frustrate attempts to involve students in decision-making. Some of their ramifications will be discussed later, including the question of whether it is really worth the energy to try to involve students in decision-making.

Staff attitudes about decision-making: The staff members of alternative schools begin with many crucial assets. They are dissatisfied with traditional education and dedicated to finding other ways of teaching and learning. They want to work with and know students and fellow teachers as individuals, to humanize education. They are willing to commit a great deal of energy to making the alternative school work. Most are willing to stay until 6 p.m. or later every night, to endure endless meetings, to question just about every aspect of their own behavior and of the structure of their schools.

Yet the staff members of alternative schools also seem to begin with some attitudes and beliefs that limit their effectiveness in both decision-making and in other aspects of building an alternative school:

1. In their desire to be open and non-authoritarian with students, they fail to make full use of the competence they possess and the natural authority that comes with their experience. Rather than promoting student involvement by being non-directive, such staff members help create a chaotic school community that drains the limited energy of students and staff.

   Example: Students in an urban alternative school decided they wanted to go on a camping trip. They asked a teacher to go along. Most had never been camping before. However, they relied on everybody to bring what was needed; they didn't clarify any responsibilities students would have on the trip; and at the last minute, they decided to let some additional friends go along. The teacher stayed in the background, feeling the trip was the students' thing and they would learn from their mistakes. The trip was fiasco. Some students got drunk and stole equipment from other students and other campers. A student cut his hand with an

axe and a huge bonfire got out of control for a few minutes.

2. Staff members inevitably play a key role in decision-making within the school because of their central relationship to it. They are constantly present at the school and have the best access to information that shapes decisions. They have pondered the goals and nature of the school extensively, and have highly developed ideas about what the school should become. They have a professional stake in the school's success that is not shared by parents and students. Yet they are often reluctant to face the issues of power and authority implied by their role. One common consequence of this attitude is that the staff's decision-making power increases informally, without the students or the staff themselves being aware of its extent.

   Example: After the town meeting failed, there was never any formal attempt to create an alternative. However, more and more, the staff meetings became the key arena for decision-making. Few students understood this, however, and did not have a clear idea where certain key decisions about the school were being made. Since the staff's assumption of power was gradual, they never clearly stated and publicized the fact that they were making key decisions about the school's future.

4. Staff members have great difficulty in working cooperatively. Although they talk a great deal about community, the conflicting concept of "doing your own thing" is what staff members really act on. Because of over-concern about anyone becoming too powerful, staff is extremely reluctant to delegate authority and to allow members of the staff to assume a leadership role.

Example: Some students complained that there was no quiet place to study in the school, that some students turned everyplace into a lounge and made it impossible to study. Staff members agreed to keep several sections of the school as quiet areas. However, only a few followed through on this decision when it meant confronting students. Two staff members told students they didn't agree with the decision, and indicated to students that staff members who were trying to follow through on the agreement were just too uptight.

4. Having escaped from the phoney expertise of the traditional school, staff members underestimate the need for alternative forms of expertise in their own school. They rely too much on the notion that any well-meaning "open" person can be an effective teacher, counselor, etc.

   Example: The staff believe that any sensitive well-meaning person can counsel students individually or in a group. However, counseling groups that were set up disbanded after a year, with students complaining about aimless wandering discussions and staff expressing the need for more training in group leadership and group process.

These attitudes of staff members, which have decisively influenced the patterns of school development with respect to decision-making, will be discussed again in the analysis of specific issues presented later in this section.

Institutional context: We have called the third main ingredient in the development of alternative school decision-making the institutional context. It includes both those parts of the outside environment that influence the school (school system, neighborhood, accrediting agency, foundation, etc.) and some key planning decisions in the development of an

alternative school that set clear limits on what can be done in the school once it is operating. Some key aspects of an alternative school's institutional context that affect patterns of decision-making include:

1. School size: 200 students seem to be the upper limit in school size before a qualitatively different set of problems emerge in decision-making (some would set the limit much lower--at 50). 200 is the largest number of students that will allow most students and teachers to know each other at least by name and face. Within such a community, many grievances and conflicts can be dealt with in an informal face-to-face way. It is much easier for students within such a school to have a personal stake in its operation. In large schools, many decision-making meetings are preoccupied with logistics, and the options open to people for dealing with such issues as fighting and security are severely limited. A "school" could be composed of a number of units of 200 provided they are geographically separated. But the mere fact of having 1200 or 2000 students in one location is impossible to overcome, even with a house system or other means of subdividing students.
2. Free choice of the school by students: Ideally, students should have as free an option as possible to choose a particular alternative school. With such free choice operating, different alternatives can clarify at the time the student decides whether or not to enter the school the type of education they offer and also the responsibilities they expect students to fulfill. Based on the experience of several alternatives now in existence, the attempt to impose an alternative on a student body that has no choice about whether to attend (e.g. by taking over a neighbor-

hood school through agreement with the board of education) is unworkable.

In connection with this issue of student choice, it should be remembered that few public or private schools can be chosen with complete freedom in the current educational system. An alternative school may represent a student's only viable option, given repressive and dangerous traditional schools, compulsory attendance, parental pressure, and the lack of meaningful job options for young people.

3. Student diversity: A hallmark of many alternative schools has been their commitment to attracting as diverse a student body as possible in terms of race, ethnic group, social class, and previous success in school. Particular alternative schools have been hard-pressed to meet the needs of such diverse student bodies in one school program, and there is some evidence that it is the white middle class student who benefits most in each situation. A different approach is to create a series of schools that make a greater attempt to clarify the types of programs they will offer and students they can serve. The pros and cons of this idea are discussed under the heading of Student Diversity later in this section and in the working paper contained in Appendix C. Whatever one's position on the issue of student diversity, it is clear that the initial decision made about the student body's composition is a crucial choice that affects many aspects of the school's development including decision-making.

4. Physical Location: The choice of a location is a key consideration influencing the decision-making process in several crucial ways. Survival in certain locations dictates limits on student activity that often become thorny issues in alternative schools. For example, an alternative school within a traditional school must

consider conflicts with conservative tenents that can result in eviction. Schools located in areas with high burglary rates must consider how they can work out the concept of an open campus without losing all their equipment. Failure to consider physical location and to clarify the constraints it puts on people as a condition for entering the school will result in constant hassels related to this issue.

5. Program history: Most alternative schools begin with no history of past operation, which is to their advantage. However, some alternative schools don't start from scratch. For example, when a traditional school is designated to experiment and a new staff is brought on, or when an alternative school in a crisis hires a new director, key events of past history forclose certain options that may be possible in a completely new alternative. For example, a large alternative public school had several serious racial fights and a new director had been brought on. It seemed clear to him that one more incident in the school would result in severe restrictions being placed in it, and he felt that he had to limit open access to the school to outsiders and to make the rule that students had to sign in at some class or learning center at all times during the day. Others might have chosen other responses to the situation, but the point is that past history places constraints on alternative schools that connot merely be wished away.

6. Relationships with Funding and Accrediting Agencies: Any alternative school is constrained somewhat in its operations by its relationship to funding and accrediting agencies. A public alternative must constantly fight to maintain its autonomy in the face of school board rules and decisions. A private alternative must expend large amounts of energy raising funds from individuals or from other organizations

(e.g. when VISTA pays some of the school's teachers). No alternative then operates "outside the system". Schools merely choose the points at which they wish to relate to the larger society. Such relationships put important constraints on the school's autonomy in decision-making. They force the school to constantly reconcile its own agenda with the agenda of other organizations and individuals. Survival with integrity means that as many people as possible in the school understand potential internal/external contradictions so that they can be faced honestly and reconciled in decision-making.

Some Specific Issues

The preceding discussion of three important ingredients for alternative school decision-making student attitudes, staff attitudes, and the institutional context--should help clarify the analysis of six specific issues in decision-making that received special consideration at the conference. The following analysis of these issues can not be considered a blueprint for desirable alternative school decision-making, but rather as an important but limited starting point for further discussion, experimentation, and analysis.

Should students be involved in decision-making? The lack of initial interest in decision-making that has been experienced in almost every alternative school caused conference participants to rethink the rationale for student involvement and to ask whether it was really necessary. Some people argued that the original rationale for involving students was that school initiators had felt that students really wanted to be involved, that student involvement was vital to the survival of the school. Based on their experience with widespread student apathy, they argued that it would be better to place decision-making clearly in the hands of

the staff and to devote more staff energy to finding out what students wanted through talking and working with them, rather than constantly prodding them to become directly involved in a formal decision-making process. Other participants responded that they did not feel a viable school community could be created in the long run without direct student involvements. They presented two main arguments:

1. If students' main avenue for involvement in decision-making is through complaining and expressing opinions to staff, they will, in the long run, see the school as being governed arbitrarily and become alienated from it. Without bearing responsibility for working through a decision-making process and carrying out decisions, they will expect that their complaints will always be remedied without understanding the difficulties involved in actually making and carrying out decisions.
2. Lower and working class students and ethnic minorities get short-changed in alternative schools. A decision-making procedure left primarily in the hands of middle class teachers will reinforce the class-biased nature of many alternative school practices.

The argument that it isn't necessary to involve students in decision-making was questioned from a second perspective. It was argued that even if student involvement is unnecessary to make the alternative school work in the short run, it is necessary as a preparation for later life. To fail to involve students in decision-making, it was argued, was merely to reinforce the passivity students had acquired in the traditional school and traditional culture. Two commentaries were written on this issue by participants. Jerry Fletcher discusses ways that alternative schools might prepare students to identify and to actively protest significant infringements on human rights.

Steve Wilson's paper on Metro, while bringing a general reaction of accuracy from most people, is also profoundly disturbing in a number of ways. One seems especially important to me. Students only protest about trivial issues of personal comfort. As long as they are comfortable, as long as they have freedom to maneuver in their individual expressive realm, they tend not to protest about other kinds of issues.

It could be argued that our society suffers from a similar inability on the part of its people to identify and respond to significant infringements of human rights....It may not be a coincidence that in school the same thing seems to happen. Students only protest over creature comforts which affect them.... Suppose we decided that possibly the most significant education for citizenship was the ability to identify a significant infringement of human rights or basic American rights when one is brewing, and to be willing and able to protest in some significant way. If schools provided training in such citizenship competencies, they would presumably provide opportunities for protests about significant social issues.

However, protests interact in complex ways with energy and emotional resources.... We all too often assume that fighting for any cause is good and educational for students (or that any form of student decision-making is good). The assumption seems to be that small successes lead on to large and more significant successes, that practice in decision-making on a small scale, in which a student is successful, will give him confidence to take on increasingly more difficult decisions; that successful protest in small matters will lead on to the undertaking of protest in more significant matters. The evidence from Metro and Adams would seem to indicate that success in the expressive, creature comfort area leads to apathy. Possibly we should give much more

thought to what kinds of experiences in fact lead to an enhanced capacity to undertake more significant protest. Alinsky's techniques, for instance, don't put people through a long series of small protests to train them for more significant undertakings.

The possibility of fatigue, of energy drain, is too real. We ought to work on the issue of selectivity, of how to know when a fight is so important as to deserve the expenditure of our limited emotional and energy resources.

Glorianne Wittes prepared a working paper expressing a consistent point of view. She distinguished the politics of protest and the politics of institution building. She argues that the latter may be more necessary for student involvement in alternative schools but that "both are valid vehicles for change, and both should be encouraged in alternative schools." The politics of institution-building she argues, "requires a different motivation, a more sophisticated awareness of means and ends, and an articulated ideology." She criticizes the nebulous free-flowing atmosphere of many alternative schools and feels that the setting of limits is healthy for students' development, so long as their are clear avenues for the resolution of conflicts:

> Tension provokes participation in attempts to change the unpalatable situation. Institutional structure and constraints (provided they are not unduly repressive) may be more productive to teach citizenship skills to kids than an environment which, like a vacuum, poses no constraints to move against. Compulsory attendance, no smoking rules, etc. may force kids and staff to articulate values, to consider reality pressures and external constraints, etc. and in some cases generate active forms of student protest.

To be accountable to students a teacher must hold values and demonstrate these values in some sort of course structure, class requirements, etc. Without these, students don't know what to expect from the teacher or what is expected from them. Accountability builds in constraints, and with it, possible conflict between students and teachers....

Some specific suggestions for increasing student involvement in decision-making are contained in Section IV of "Student Involvement in Decision-making in an Alternative High School". Additional suggestions are also presented in subsequent parts of this section.

Trust, Commitment, and Leadership: Participants' comments about their schools focused repeatedly on the gap between expressed desires to form a community and the actual behavior of staff and students:

---We propose to be a community in our proposal, yet once a student is in here, they don't want to be involved in becoming a community.

---There also exists a problem in clarity among students concerning what is an alternative and what is a copout.

---We need to deal with the gap between the fantasy and reality of love and community.

---There is a lot of selfishness growing out of the concern for individual freedom on the faculty.

---There is too much love talk. Not enough love action.

For both students and staff, "building a community" and "doing your own thing" come into constant conflict. In practice, staff and students are often unwilling to change their own personal priorities or habits for the good of the community. For example, in one school, the following incident occured:

Within a few months after moving into a new building, the walls were covered with marks and writing and the carpet with coffee and pop stains. Most students and staff were dissatisfied with this situation; funds for recarpeting and repainting would not be available for five years. Furthermore, the disintegration of the building left the school open to attack by a hostile school superintendent who argued that the alternative school was demolishing a new building at a time when many kids had to attend pre-1900 schools. But from day to day, it was impossible for students (who talked a great deal about developing a caring community) to keep their feet off the wall, to pick up pop cans so they wouldn't be spilled, etc.

Teachers often follow the same patterns as students:

We tried to keep teachers' paperwork to a minimum, but one thing we really needed were complete information forms on courses people intended to teach. With 150 courses, missing information fouled up our whole registration procedure. Even when this happened a couple of times, though, a few teachers still didn't bother to get the information in on time or to fill out the forms completely.

Some might argue that the issue in these examples are not crucial; others strongly disagree. The point is that the dynamics represented by these examples constantly recur in alternative schools. A situation like the following one is the exception rather than the rule:

During a basketball game two students got into an argument. We have physical education at a Y.M.C.A. If a fight broke out (and students from the school customarily settled disagreements by fighting in their day to day lives), we wouldn't have had facilities for gym. This would mean no credit and no gradation unless we found other facilities. I chose to walk out of the gym and let them decide if a fight or a gym

> program....I hope it helped them to see that you can talk things out without fighting or that sometimes personal things must be sublimated when the goal of the whole population is involved.

Staff and students of alternative schools have been reluctant to deal directly with the low level of cooperation in alternative schools, since this reality runs counter to the alternative school ideology. For example, when a particular form of governance fails, the tendency has been to try another formal structure (e.g. representation based on groups of friends rather than diverse counseling groups) rather than to confront the lack of commitment to the community that undercuts each specific structural change.

One means for encouraging cooperation that has worked well in some situations, but has serious limitations, is to appeal to the need for unified action when the school's survival is threatened. In a crisis situation, individual differences and concerns are submerged (e.g. when the school might lose its building lease because of conflicts with other tenents). Appeals to the school's survival also work well in the first year, when it may be operating on a trial basis or under special scrutiny by the community. But as time passes, appeals based on threats to the school's survival lose their effect. Furthermore, the frequent use of this type of appeal suggests that in normal times strong cooperative effort in building a community is not necessary.

Related to the problems of cooperation in alternative schools is the problem of mutual trust. Because one of the major shortcomings of the traditional school is its top-down authority pattern, participants in alternative school have guarded carefully against any accumulation of power in the hands of one person or group. This concern has unfortunately led in many cases, to an extreme lack of trust. Those most concerned about decision-making feel they must directly participate in the formulation of even the tiniest decisions and plans. They

are unwilling to delegate authority to their fellows to work these things out in more manageable groups and to allow individuals to play a leadership role in reaching decisions or carrying out tasks.

But, as indicated earlier, direct democracy has not proved a viable means for operating even a small alternative community. The failuer of the town meeting or the all-staff meeting, when they are the only decision-making forum, diminishes trust instead of increasing it. It is clear that alternative schools must develop mechanisms for decision-making that will build trust rather than diminishing it, and that these mechanisms must involve the willingness to delegate authority and to allow individuals to assume leadership.

If the observations in this subsection are correct, then the participants in alternative schools need to develop a much greater capacity for cooperative action, sacrifice, mutual trust, and willingness to delegate responsibility and accept leadership. Once again, these qualities will not "emerge naturally." They must be seen as explicit objectives to work toward and not as the obvious outcome of sincere hopes and dreams. The structure and practice within the schools must reflect these objectives, and staff and students will need specific education in skills related to achieving these difficult goals.

Clarity in Decision-making: Participants were agreed that one primary characteristic of a successful approach to shared decision-making is clarity. This runs counter to the philosophies of many alternative schools who pride themselves on lack of structure and the fact that decisions are often made on the spot and on a person to person basis rather than being structured and institutionalized. The tacit assumption has been that all structure limits freedom and inhibits growth.

Conference participants adopted a different viewpoint. They felt that some clarification and structure empowers people rather than limiting them. For example, if decision-making meetings are always called spontaneously, if the agendas of meetings aren't publicized, if meetings are long and rambling, if results aren't publicized, this free-wheeling approach drastically restricts the types of people who will be involved in decision-making. Information about times, places, and topics of meetings and information about what went on at previous meetings will flow largely through informal friendship networks, often consisting of staff and a few tuned in students. It will be difficult for other students and perhaps some staff members to attend meetings that they chance to hear about when they are not certain what will be discussed. Even fewer people will stick out one or more of these meetings when it seems as if nothing gets done and no one ever gets to the point.

In a situation like this (which is typical of many past alternative school experiences), a measure of clarity and structure will broaden participation and increase the amount of energy that is productively directed to strengthening the school. At the conference, participants identified several areas in which greater clarity would strengthen alternative schools:

1. Goals: In some schools, there are basic and continuing conflicts that results from a difference of opinion about what the school's goals are. In other schools, there is a differential awareness of goals, with some people having a highly developed perception of the school's goals and with others having no idea that the school has any goals at all. Lack of agreement about goals leads to constant wrangling about specific issues and contributes to a lack of trust and an unwillingness to delegate authority.

   Without believing that a school's goals will ever be perfectly clear or that they

can or should all be stated in terms of behavioral objectives, conference participants suggested that:

a. A statement of a school's goals be formulated with participation of everyone in the school.

b. That these goals be stated as specifically as possible.

c. That to the extent possible, they be ordered in terms of importance.

d. That they be widely and continually publicized to every member of the school community.

e. That they be reviewed regularly and modified when appropriate.

2. External constraints: Any person joining the school community should be given a clear understanding of the external constraints imposed on the school and the ways in which these constraints affect the school's operation. If the school is in an office building and students aren't permitted to go into certain parts of the building, this should be made clear initially. If staff members must fill out certain meaningless reports to satisfy a funding agency, this should be made clear initially. This is not to say that external constraints can't be changed. However, people should understand that they currently exist, so that they will never feel that they were deceived when they became a part of the school.

3. Internal understandings and limits: Unlike external constraints, internal understandings and limits are those that the school community can set for itself. Schools should, of course, be extremely cautious in setting up understandings and limits, but if they exist they must be clarified to all teachers and students who enter the school. For staff, such limits might include the definition of their responsibilities in terms of

teaching, counseling, developing new courses, participation in decision-making, participation in staff development, and paperwork. For students, such limits might include responsibilities for participating in learning experiences, decision-making and community responsibilities, and behavior limits. Conference participants questioned whether any school community can function for long without clarifying such responsibilities (always subject to change, of course).

4. Overall Plan for Decision-making: Without presenting a detailed model for a governance structure, participants agreed that the governance structure for any particular school should be described as precisely as possible and that its structure and means of functioning should be clear to every person in the community. If someone has a complaint or an idea, they should know exactly when and where they can follow through on that complaint or idea.

   In general, we feel that the best governmental structure would include a representative governing board, a set of standing committees that deal with recurring issues and activities, and special committees that come into existence to deal with specific problems. These groups should include staff, students, and possible parents. Different sized groups, with different compositions, and different methods of procedure are appropriate for different types of decision-making. Alternative schools should accumulate experience that suggests which types of forums are best for which types of decisions. For example, all-school meetings are, on the basis of past experience, effective forums for airing opinions and grievances for a smaller group that will then make a decision for building solidarity in crises, and for deciding between well-articulated alternatives on key issues that are of high interest.

Since a major danger in any representative decision-making process is that there will be a gap between the decision-makers and the rest of the community, a major activity of the governance structure (perhaps the concern of a permanent committee) should be to inform people about the nature of the governance structure, the decisions that have been made, and the ways in which additional people can get involved in decision-making.

One working paper prepared at the conference by Mike Lawler outlined some tentative ideas about the dynamics of effective decision-making structures. This paper is contained in Appendix C.

5. Procedures within decision-making groups: The conference participants believed that decision-making should be as efficient as possible, consistent with everyone getting a reasonable hearing for his or her views. This would imply an agenda, some rules of procedures, and a procedural leader who is supported by other group members in this role. Within such a framework, some suggested steps were developed that should be taken before a decision is made. These steps call for analysis, clarification, and agreement in the following areas:

   a. The issue. Examining and clarifying the issue focuses the attention of those involved on the heart of the matter. This clarification should include such points as the relationship of the issue to the goals and current structure of the school.

   b. Boundaries. Once the issue has been defined, an examination must be made of the boundaries involved. These include external boundaries such as accountability to outside agencies, legal constraints, etc., and internal boundaries such as deadlines, lines of responsibility, etc.

c. Roles in decision-making. Responsibility for gathering information related to the decision, clarifying alternatives, or actually the making of the decision may be delegated in some way. Responsibility for actually making a decision or for gathering information related to the decision may be delegated in some way. This may require setting up new roles or redefining roles for this particular decision-making process. If such clarification of roles is necessary, there must be formal agreement about any role definitions set up.

d. Rules of procedure. Participants must agree on clear rules for making the decision. Preferably, procedure for making decision will have been set up in advance, and not developed on the spot while a specific issue is under consideration.

e. Follow-through. The group who makes the decision must be aware of the need to define a follow-through procedure when the task is completed. This consideration must take into account responsibility for carrying out the decision, possible repercussions of the decisioning and sanctions that might be necessary if the decision is not carried out. Consideration of this issue before the decision is made should shape the final decision. This analysis may reveal that a seemingly attractive decision cannot be carried out or would require too much effort for the benefit involved.

It should be recognized that this pre-decision process may take as little as five minutes or as much as several weeks. Each step should be clarified before the next is taken. At any time along with way, obstacles to agreement may cause the process to shift back to the first step and begin again.

6. Carrying out decisions: Alternative schools have discovered that carrying out decisions is much more difficult than making them. Several ideas were advanced about ways to increase the chances that decisions are carried out:

   a. Within decision-making meetings, it should be clear to everyone present just what decisions have been made and who needs to do what to carry them out.

   b. There should be an effective procedure for communicating decisions to people in the school community.

   c. There should be a general understanding within the school community that people will abide by decisions made in the regular decision-making process whether they personally agree with them or not.

   d. There should be a review process built into the governance structure, so that success in carrying out decisions can be evaluated and in some cases sanctions applied for failure to abide by decisions.

7. Conditions for the exclusion of teachers and staff: When alternative schools are started in an atmosphere of high commitment and good feeling, the possibility of kicking someone out is severally not considered. The decision to exclude someone is especially unthinkable at the start, when the school is seen by many as dealing with the needs of the widest possible cross-section of students. A honeymoon period at the beginning of the program confirms the judgment that "we just don't have many of the problems that other schools have."

   Yet every school represented at the conference has been faced with the need to exclude some student or staff member. In reflecting on this experience, the following points are made:

a. If the limits and expectations in the program had been made clear from the beginning, the schools wouldn't, in most cases, have drifted into a situation where someone was so fare out of line that he/she had to be excluded.

b. Each school should have a process that involves a set of steps presenting feedback, options, counseling, etc. to someone who is seriously outside the expectations that are set up. However, when all else fails, the final step in this process must be exclusion.

c. Without clear limits and a clear process for dealing with students and staff who fail to meet community expectations, the decision to exclude someone will inevitably be seen as unfair and harsh and can sometimes tear the school apart. If limits are unclear and must be invented at the time a decision is made about whether to exclude someone, people will point to a dozen examples of others who did the same thing or something worse with no consequences. It is disasterous to be deciding the school's general policies and the fate of an individual at the same time.

The preceding discussion of clarity in decision-making might sound harsh and authoritarian to some, out of keeping with the spirit of alternative schools. Two points should be made in response to this observation. First, since the core of the alternative school movement is a sensitivity to the individual, we assume that the suggestions made here will be interpreted in the light of that sensitivity. The intent of this discussion is to help overcome some serious contradictions that conference participants have observed between the growth of a healthy open community and a style of individual action that justifies individual selfishness under the banner of freedom. Second, the notion that structure is necessarily limiting is simply

innaccurate in light of the experience of alternative schools in the past five years. On the contrary, this experience suggests that our continued growth depends on our ability to develop structure that can strengthen alternative schools. To continue the rhetoric of organic growth in the face of recent experience would reflect a disasterous inability to profit from past successes and problems.

Student Diversity: Alternative schools have had a commitment to deal with all types of diversity on dimensions like race, ethnic group, social class, level of basic reading and math skills, interests, past success in school, and personality. They feel that considering any one of these dimensions, the traditional school has served only a certain small percentage of students. After several years of experience, the question is now being thrown back at alternative schools: How successful have alternative schools been in dealing with student diversity?

With respect to race, social class, and ethnic group, it seems that alternative schools with diverse student bodies have benefitted white middle class students most and low-income students in general and ethnic minorities least. Many popular assumptions of alternative schooling have a middle class white bias. For example, the notion of allowing a student to do his or her own thing is fine for a student with basic reading, writing, and math skills, but of questionable value to a black or brown student who lacks these skills. Further, it is questionable for middle class teachers to tell black and brown students that college degrees and material things aren't important, when the middle class teacher has access to them, but his/her students don't.

In the decision-making process, the same types of biases against the non-middle-class-white students occur. For example, observation indicates that low-income black students in a diverse alternative school were less able to take advantage of the school's course options

because they had difficulty coping with the long catalogue through which information about courses was communicated and because they were less tuned in to informal communication networks about the characteristics of the courses.

The study of "Student Involvement in Decision-making in an Alternative High School" describes the ways in which institutional decision-making in the school fails to mesh with the styles, values, and priorities of "black school-alienated students."

The diversity of staff in an alternative school seldom mirrors the diversity of its student body. This imbalance stems in part from a biased set of assumptions about what constitute a qualified teacher, with the person who has done wide traveling, attended a prestigious university, and expounds a hip philosophy favored over someone who lacks these credentials but is intimately familiar with the process of growing up in a low-income neighborhood in the city. A major part of this problem is the difficulty of identifying teachers who are in touch with the realities of lower class and lower-middle class students, even on faculties that are diverse by race.

In the working paper prepared at the conference by Fritz Mulhauser (see Appendix C), he argues that alternative schools have failed in trying to be all things to all people. The impulse to save the world resulted in ambiguity about what the strengths and weaknesses of alternative schools are. They have created a <u>different</u> learning environment that serves some students better than the traditional school, but not a <u>differentiated</u> learning environment that serves the needs of different students in different ways. Instead of a set of similar alternative schools that claim they can serve everyone, he advocates a series of alternative that clarify more precisely what types of students they serve, what types of programs they can offer, what their expectations of students are, etc. Such alternatives already exist, serving, for example,

black students, Chicano students, white lower-income students, and students with special career interests. For example, of the schools represented at the conference, the Group School serves lower-income class students, while the School for Human Services is for students interested in human service occupations.

Even within such focused alternatives, however, diversity will, of course, continue to be a major issue. A school dealing only with low-income white students desires to be much more effective than traditional schools in responding to the considerable diversity still reflected in their student bodies in terms of skill levels, life goals, personalities, interests, styles of action, etc. Thus, in both those schools that continue to admit the widest diversity of students and in schools that become more focused, conference participants see a need for increased capacity within particular schools to deal effectively with diversity.

As in other areas of concern, conference participants felt the attempt should be to anticipate problems and to clarify goals and work towards them, rather than hoping that the needs of diverse groups of students can be set by being open and allowing relationships to evolve "naturally."

With respect to decision-making then, the question of student diversity raises issues like the following:

1. Each dimension of diversity that exists within an alternative school (e.g. race, career interest) puts an additional strain on the effort to reach and carry our widely-accepted decisions within the school. How much diversity can a school have before legitimate decision-making breaks down?

2. Within any alternative school, there will be initial differences in the desire of students to participate in decision-making and the extent to which students will gain desired ends in the decision-making process. What types of procedures can help lessen such disparities?

A few ideas about dealing with diversity in decision-making are contained in Section IV of "Student Involvement in Decision-making in an Alternative High School." The type of clarity that was discussed in the previous section would, in the opinion of conference participants, also contribute to the development of an acceptable decision-making procedure in the light of student diversity.

Decision-making and the Curriculum: Decision-making relates to the curriculum in a number of crucial ways. At the level of the individual learning experience, decisions must be reached between the student and the teacher or facilitator about the nature of the experience and the responsibilities of each person involved. At the institutional level, decisions must be made about the total structure of the learning program, dealing with questions like the following:

--How do the learning opportunities we provide relate to the school's goals for student development?

--Should certain specific learning experiences or certain types of learning experiences be required for all students?

--How can the internal ideas about the curriculum be reconciled with external constraints of school systems, accrediting agencies, and outside organizations that cooperate with the school (e.g. of a museum or business that wants to offer a learning experience for students).

These questions suggest some thorny issues that alternative schools have encountered in practice. After years of socialization in traditional schools, most students have "failed to seize the initiative to evolve their own learning environment". Most students have not identified individual interests and pursued them independently. Most students have not related specific learning experiences to overall life goals. After many years of painful experience in traditional schools, students with skill deficiences have often not attempted to correct them in the alternative schools; on the contrary, they have sought to avoid learning experiences that involve skill work.

The rapid collapse of naive assumptions about the typical student taking control of his or her own learning led alternative school initiators to see the need for strategies that would facilitate the transition of students from the status of dependent to independent learners. In most schools, the result has been a smoragasbord of specific course offerings, a wide selection of courses from which the student can choose. Generally, students are able not only to choose from a wide variety of course offerings, but also to exert effective pressure for courses that aren't offered and to develop and teach their own courses. In theory, the stage in which a student chooses courses from a wide menu of offerings is a transitional stage. This will be followed by a final stage of truly independent learning in which students define their own interests without the course structure, by pursuing group and independent projects and extended learning activities that they themselves have developed. In practice, this theory has encountered a number of difficulties:

1. Many students do not transcend the stage of choosing courses from the expanded and varied course catalogue of the alternative school. Further, they continue to deal with the alternative curriculum the same way they dealt with the traditional

curriculum: as a game to be beaten, a puzzle to be solved. The students continue to see themselves as a passive consumers of education.

2. Some students do move beyond the course structure and become involved in independent and group projects that they have defined themselves, extended internship experiences, educational travel, etc. But the students who grow in this way often tend to be the students who benefit most from whatever type of educational program they find themselves in, whether it be traditional or alternative. The students least likely to reach this stage are those who are also served most poorly by the traditional school.

3. The quality of the smorgasbord of course offerings as a curriculum leaves much to be desired. First, its relationship to the school's overall goals for learning is often unclear. If a school is trying to combat racism, for example, or prepare students to deal with rapid cultural change, the smorgasbord assembled from specific teacher and student interests may have no clear relation to these goals. Further, these mini-courses may not be related to each other; and the process of education within particular courses may be quite conventional, even though the course has a groovy title or meets in the community.

Some felt these criticisms of the smorgasbord course plan, while containing some valid points, overlooked its advantages. They argue that alternative schools do not yet have a sufficient experience base to develop comprehensive plans for curricula. They feel that the smorgasbord approach, by encouraging many different types of learning activities can operate as a natural selection mechanism, since the best mini-courses can be retained, and refined and slowly build into a coherent education-

al program, while the ones that don't work can be easily dropped. They don't feel that the problem of groovy courses titles masking conventional teaching methods is caused or encouraged by the smorgasbord approach. On the contrary, they feel that when students and teachers develop courses they are interested in, the potential for effective courses is enhanced.

Growing out of these concerns with the typical alternative school curriculum, a number of specific suggestions resulted and a number of specific issues were sharpened to the extent that they can now be analyzed further. There was general agreement that at the level of the specific learning experience:

1. Teachers should develop and learn about specific alternative classroom approaches and techniques for promoting independent learning.
2. Models should be developed for decision-making within a specific learning experience that will provide a plan for the specific experience that takes into account the needs and responsibilities of teacher and student. These agreements should include both limits on behavior and learning expectations that are satisfactory to both teacher and student.

There was also general agreement about the need to look very critically at the smorgasbord curriculum, and to begin this inquiry by recognizing that the mere consumption of educational courses from an expanded menu falls far short of our ultimate goals for alternative learning programs. Discussing this desired reanalysis, however, led to two final perplexing questions, both of which are closely related to other issues of decision-making discussed earlier. The first question is: Given the desire to bring the curriculum more directly in line with key learning goals of the school, what legitimate decision-making and curriculum development

process can be employed to move in this direction? One school, for example, attempted to pull together its smorgasbord curriculum by centering education around "core courses" focused on urban problems and taught by several teachers cooperatively. The plan was a failure, partly due to inadequate planning and skill in cooperative teaching, partly because the core course idea was not strongly supported in practice by many students and teachers, who wanted to maintain the smorgasbord approach. Much more thinking needs to be done about ways of reconciling the need for developing new approaches to curriculum with the concept of shared decision-making and the general problems of clarity, trust, commitment, leadership, benefits to student subgroups, etc. outlined earlier.

A second perplexing question closely related to the first is the question of specific requirements: What experiences or competencies should be required of all students? Most participants agreed that the present learning program of the typical alternative school can often have the effect of limiting later options for students. This shortcoming stems partly from the school's incomplete analysis of what options in terms of college, jobs, etc. it would like to prepare their students for. The problem partly stems from the fact that the open curriculum allows students to avoid certain types of learning experiences (e.g. students with low reading skills who avoid courses in reading). There was general agreement that alternative schools have to think much more critically about their responsibility to prepare students for the choices and barriers they will confront after leaving school. There was also general agreement that alternative schools had to be much more effective in counseling students about the implications of immediate educational choices in terms of their effects on options open later in life.

There was disagreement, however, about some further steps. Some people advocated minimum skill levels for graduation from an alternative high school (Community High School,

for example, requires 12th grade reading and 8th grade math ability for graduation). Others termed such competency requirements "rigid and out of date." Others argued that certain specific learning experiences should be required of all students. Some felt that carefully considered requirements were the only way to prevent students from closing off key life opportunities, while others felt that the school's responsibility was to present as much information as possible about the potential benefits of a specific learning experience, but to maintain the individual's ultimate freedom to decide what he/she wanted to do. Charity James suggested a context in which certain specific learning experiences could be made mandatory while guarding against the proliferation of rigid and inappropriate requirements: "In my view, it should be permissible within the decision-making framework for a group of teachers to say to a student (or rather one of them by agreement), unless you can give us a good reason why you shouldn't take such and such a course we're going to make it a requirement for x weeks, but we are doing this with you in a spirit of inquiry and want you to come back later and say if it helps or if not, why, not."

Burning Out: When an alternative school begins in an atmosphere of high commitment and good feeling, little thought is generally given to the need to conserve energy. The hallmark of the alternative school staff and student body is their long hours at the school, their willingness to make the school the central, often the only, focus of their lives. The organic philsophy of development has a postulate that is supported nicely by the evidence of high commitment that is present everywhere when a school opens: the notion that all mistakes are growth experiences that automatically bring the school closer to an ideal method of operation. Applied to decision-making, this idea might lead to a statement like the following: "We know the all-school meeting probably won't work, but when people see it's not working they'll learn from

their mistakes and try something else." The image is one of a sailing ship, tacking now this way and now that, with the crew becoming increasingly more skillful in keeping the ship on course.

A cornier but more appropriate image might be of a person running across a field, with someone firing a gun at him/her. Each time this person makes a mistake, he/she is shot in the stomach, with a corresponding loss of vital fluids and a cumulative drain on the capacity to run, stumble, or crawl forward. This image is much more appropriate for considering the development of alternative schools, since it takes into account the limited amount of energy available to a given school over any extended period and the high cost of each mistake.

This drain of energy, this process of "burning out" which was referred to often at the conference, must be carefully considered in the development of any plan for decision-making in alternative schools. For the psychological stresses and the endless rambling meetings of the typical alternative school decision-making process are viewed in retrospect as a major contributor to the burning out process. Some specific generalizations about burning out, based on alternative school experience, follows:

1. The initiators of a school and the first group of students and teachers involved in its operation have an abnormally high level of energy in working on the new project. Yet they assume that they themselves can sustain this energy level and that teachers and students who are brought in later will also operate at these high energy levels.
2. One manifestation of burning out is that students and staff begin to narrow their concerns within the school by withdrawing from decision-making and other activities (e.g. a formerly active teacher who withdraws into just teaching a particular subject).

3. Another manifestation of burning out is the high rate of turnover on alternative school staffs. Many schools turn over almost completely in three or four years.

This past experience suggests strongly that decision-making procedures must be developed with constant consideration to their cost in terms of the limited pool of energy available. Past experience with burning out also reinforces the initial premise on which the conference was based: the crucial need at this point in history for alternative schools to begin to learn from eachother's specific successes and failures in areas like decision-making, so that valuable energy is not wasted in repeating approaches that have a high probability of failing.

V. Some Conclusions and Some Questions

As we have tried to emphasize and reemphasize in this report, the conference did not come up with a handbook for decision-making in alternative schools. Many important decision-making issues weren't covered in conference discussions, others that were discussed aren't included in the report, many discussions raised more questions than they answered, etc. At the same time, the conference did make significant progress on a number of topics and reinforced for many the idea that there are common patterns in our experience and that we can find ways to learn from each other.

At the risk of further over-simplifying the complexities of alternative school decision-making, we have summarized (below some of the ideas presented at the conference which elicited general agreement). Some of these ideas are generalizations about past experience, especially problems in our past experience. Some are positive principles for future action, but few spell out exactly how things might be done. For each statement, a number of specific questions should be raised: How could this be done in practice? What are the dangers of proceeding in this direction? How should this idea be modified in a specific school?

Yet the need for further analysis and experimentation should not obscure the extent to which the conference participants were able to agree on the common threads in their past experience and the common issues that are key to the strengthening of alternative school decision-making in the future. The commonalities are summarized below:

1. You can't build a healthy alternative school merely by opposing everything the old school stands for.
2. Even when teachers, students, and parents leave traditional schools, they still bring with them their past experiences, attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses.

These characteristics often emerge in the new situation rather than some "natural" man or woman.

3. The staff of any alternative school will almost inevitably play a central role in the school because of their experience, constant access to information, professional stake in the school, etc. Ways must be found to reconcile this reality with an effective plan for shared decision-making.
4. Certain functions must be carried out for an alternative to survive and reach its goals, and there are a limited number of approaches that can be used to carry out these functions effectively.
5. Many values and approaches that have been dubbed "natural" by the alternative school movement reflect, in reality, the particular world-view of the American white middle class.
6. There are strong similarities in the specific ways in which various alternative schools have tried to reach their goals and in the problems they have encountered.
7. The alternative school is in danger of becoming the latest national fad in education.
8. Alternative schools that are just starting are repeating many of the same energy-consuming mistakes of existing alternative schools.
9. Direct democracy through all-school or community meetings is inadequate as the primary method of decision-making. Some effective form of representative governance must be found.
10. Students who enter alternative schools typically have limited interest in becoming involved in decision-making, beyond insuring their freedom in areas touching their daily personal lives, such as dress, movement, association, etc.

11. Students strongly distrust anything that resembles traditional governance structures because of their negative past experience with student councils, etc.
12. Students generally see their most appropriate role in decision-making in terms of complaining to the staff and letting them solve the problems. But unless they are involved in the complexities of making and carrying out decisions, it seems unlikely that students will feel the institution has dealt adequately with their problems.
13. Student involvement in decision-making is often limited to a small subgroup of middle class hip students. Other subgroups aren't adequately represented by these students.
14. An important goal of an alternative school should be to help students learn to become effectively involved in decisions about key social issues not tied to their immediate personal comfort.
15. In their desire to be open and non-authoritarian, faculty fail to make full use of their competence in alternative schools.
16. Having escaped the phoney expertise of the traditional school, staff members underestimate the need for new forms of expertise in alternative schools.
17. 200 students seems to be the upper limit in school size before a qualitatively different set of problems emerge in decision-making. Beyond this limit, it is impossible to settle many crucial problems through fact-to-face contact.
18. It does not seem workable in practice (in addition to whatever ethical problems it raises) for an alternative to be imposed on students who can't freely choose it.
19. Physical location places key constratints on alternative school decision-making.

20. No alternative operates "outside the system." Schools merely choose the points at which they wish to relate to the larger society. The school will constantly face the issue of conflict between its own agenda and the agenda of the outside individuals and organizations to which it must relate.

21. Staff and students of alternative schools act more often on the idea of "doing your own thing" than on the idea of "building a community." In practice staff and students are often unwilling to change their personal priorities or habits for the good of the community

22. Constant appeals to the danger of external threats are inadequate to build an alternative community.

23. There is often a limited amount of trust between people in alternative schools. This is related to an extreme reluctance to delegate authority or to allow anyone to play a leadership role.

24. One of the primary means for strengthening alternative school decision-making should be to increase its clarity.

25. Without clarity concerning basic goals, continuing conflicts on specifics are likely to immobilize the school.

26. Schools should clarify what external constraints they operate under. Any student or teacher joining the school should understand that at that point in time, these external constraints are a reality of the school's operation.

27. While maintaining an atmoshpere of freedom and sensitivity to individuals, alternative schools must define the understandings and limits that have been set up internally. The resulting responsibilities of students and teachers should be clarified as a condition for becoming part of the school.

28. A clear structure for shared decision-making should be developed that tells the school community who decides what, how, and when. The nature of this structure should be effectively communicated to everyone in the school.

29. Since a key danger in a representative decision-making process is that there will be a gap between the decision-makers and the rest of the community, a major activity of the governance structure should be to inform people about the decisions that have been made and the ways in which additional people can feed back information to or get directly involved in decision-making.

30. An explicit procedure should be followed within the decision-making meetings that clarifies such issues as the relation of the decision to the school's goals, the external constraints that might be in conflict with the decision, etc.

31. Alternative schools have found that carrying out decisions is even more difficult than making them. Any decision must include the definition of clear responsibilities for carrying it out.

32. Members of the school community should agree to comply with legitimate decisions even when they don't personally agree with them.

33. Clear provisions should be developed for the exclusion of staff and students. A process should be spelled out that provides many opportunities for feedback, self-defense, etc., but culminates with the possibility that a person can be excluded from the school.

34. At present, middle class students see their concerns acted on in schools with diverse student bodies more often than other students. Means for remedying this situation must be found.

35. School initiators should carefully examine their reasons for seeking a diverse student body and their capacity to deal with one. Another possible approach, is to create a series of alternative schools each with a unique set of purposes, rather than admitting everyone to a single school with vagully defined purposes.

36. Even as one of a series of focused schools, an effective alternative school must be more effective in dealing positively with diverse cultural backgrounds, interests, attitudes, abilities, etc.

37. Transitional strategies are necessary to help students move from dependent to independent learning. These strategies must not have the effect of creating a new brand of passive learning within a more humane environment.

38. The pros and cons of the smorgasbord approach to curriculum must be carefully explored and alternatives developed that will work in practice.

39. Decision-making about a direction for alternative school curriculum raises all the problems of clarity, trust, commitment, leadership, benefits to subgroups, etc. raised in other decision-making areas.

40. Teachers need to learn about and develop positive alternative approaches to classroom decision-making techniques of teaching, and techniques of individual and group counseling. It is not enough to be a warm open person who wants to move in a new direction unless one is working to develop such skills.

41. There was disagreement about the value of requiring certain competence levels or certain learning experiences for all students. The pros and cons of this issue should be thoroughly explored.

42. Alternative school staff and students have limited amount of energy, and "burning out" is a major threat to alternative schools. Overall decision-making structures and specific decisions should both be considered in light of the best ways of using limited energy.

Appendix A. Characteristics of Schools

In inviting people to the conference, Center for New Schools sought individuals with extensive direct experience working in alternative schools. Below are listed 17 alternative schools in which one or more conference participants has worked for at least one year (longer in most cases). Not all participants were still associated with the school where they had this experience. The list is presented to give the reader a general understanding of the types of schools whose history of development forms the basis for this report. Naturally, the listing of a school in this appendix does not imply endorsement of any of this report's conclusions.

School information is based on forms filled out by conference participants.

Adams High School
Portland, Oregon

Public district high school.

3 years as an alternative school.

1250 students. 20% black, 80% white. Urban and Diverse. Many working class students.

Conception of the school based on the model of the teaching hospital, emphasizing the instruction of students, the training of educators, and research. Emphasis on humanizing the teacher-student relationship. Key component of the school an inquiry-oriented general education course.

Alternative School Project
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania

Public. Cooperative effort of several school districts.

1 year as an alternative school.

120 students. 75% suburban (mainly white) and 25% urban (mainly black).

Use of community as a resource. Seeks to expand learning options available to students.

Career Study Center
St. Paul, Minnesota

Public.

2 1/2 years as an alternative school.

110 students. 20% black, Latin, and Indian. 80% white. Students chosen because they can't funation in conventional high schools.

An educational intensive care unit for students unable to survive or function in the regular secondary school. Emphasis on intensive individual and group counseling, skill development, job placement, and electives in general education.

Cleveland Urban Learning Community
Cleveland, Ohio

Non-public.

2 years as an alternative school.

80 students. Reflects diversity of Cleveland area. 80% urban; 20% suburban.

Aimed at bringing high school age people together from every part of Cleveland to relate to resource people as a source of education and to share their diverse cultural experiences with other students. Students develop individual course plans which contain the objectives, goals, skills, activities, and evaluation of their work with resource people and share their experience in seminars conducted in each subject area.

Community High School
Berkeley, California

Public.

4 years as an alternative school.

209 students. 24% black, 65% white, 6% Asian, 2% Chicano, 2% Native American, 1% other.

One of several alternatives to Berkeley's main high school. The main objectives of the school are to build a community and thereby develop in each student the ability to be a contributing member of the community in which he lives; to help students learn to live in an integrated community by providing an environment that reflects the racial and cultural diversity of Berkeley, and to help students achieve a fully functional reading ability (12th grad) and at least a minimally functional math ability (8th grade).

Farragut Outpost
Chicago, Illinois

Public. An annex to Farragut High School. Receives support from the Better Boys Foundation.

4 years as an alternative high school.

31 male students. 100% black.

To give young men who have been pushed out of regular high schools a second chance to complete a high school education.

The Group School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Non-public.

1 1/2 years as an alternative school.

37 students. 90% Italian and Irish American; 10% black. Low income and working class Cambridge youth.

Educational and vocational opportunities for blue-collar youth, age 14-21. Provides a certified alternative for kids and parents who cannot afford existing private alternatives. Developing an on-going community corporation and school that seeks radical change in traditional public agencies that affect youth, e.g. schools, clinics, police, courts.

Marshall-University High School
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Public district school, serving the Southeast community, with 2/3 of students from other parts of Minneapolis.

2 years as an alternative school.

1130 students. Reflects the diversity of the city of Minneapolis.

Seeking to diversify student learning options through mini-courses, individual study, resource centers, and other alternative learning programs.

Metro High School
Chicago, Illinois

Public. City-wide.

2 1/2 years as an alternative school.

350 students. 55% black, 5% Latin, 43% white, 2% other. Reflects diversity of the city of Chicago.

A school without walls cooperating with 150 businesses, cultural organizations, and community groups. Emphasis also on building community within the program and humanizing student-teacher relationships. Program based on 10 week learning units, individual study, or special programs of black studies, day care, secretarial training, etc.

Parkway Program
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Public. City-wide.

3 1/2 years as an alternative.

800 students based in four geographically-separate units. 60% black and Latin; 40% white. Primarily urban; some suburban students.

The first school without walls, emphasizing the community as classroom. An important focus of the experience is a tutorial that meets daily. Considerable autonomy given each of the four units.

Pennsylvania Advancement School
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Public. A non-profit organization closely tied to the Philadelphia Public Schools.

5 years as an alternative school in Philadelphia.

360 6th and 7th grade students from Philadelphia public and parochial schools who are enrolled for one year at PAS. 45% black, 30% white, and 25% Puerto Rican.

A multi-faceted institution with two main goals. (1) To develop programs with students who attend PAS that respond to student need, interest, and learning style. (2) To work with Philadelphia teachers and administrators to introduce them to alternative programs and to work directly with these people to help them implement these programs in their own schools.

Pilot School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Public. Alternative operating within a Cambridge public high school.

2 1/2 years as an alternative school.

130 students. Reflect the racial and socio-economic composition of Cambridge.

Emphasis on building community, new learning options for students. Some courses in regular high schools. A cooperative program between Cambridge Public Schools and Harvard TTT Program.

St. Mary Center for Learning
Chicago, Illinois

Private Parochial.

4 1/2 years as an alternative school.

660 female students. 40% Latin, 25% black, 20% ethnic white; 15% suburban middle class white. 85% urban.

An emphasis on process education, including cirtical thinking, creativity, valueing, and affective learning. Emphasis on the student assuming responsibility for her own learning throughout life.

St. Teresa Academy
East St. Louis, Illinois

Private parochial.

3 years as an alternative school.

540 female students. Approximately 25% black, 75% white. Urban.

Attempts to meet individual needs through a more personalized and humanized curriculum, structure, and student-teacher relationship. Flexible scheduling. Extensive electives offered. Much work is done in individualized study using programs based on performance objectives.

School for Human Services
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Public. Annex to Bartram High School.

1 year as an alternative school.

165 students. 90% black, 10% white. Urban students from Bartram High School interested in human services careers.

To provide an alternative within the existing structure based on principles of affective humanistic education and to provide a coordinated experience with volunteer job practice in human service agencies. Half time job placement and half time school courses. School courses are based on a program of affective education developed by teachers in the Philadelphia schools over the past five years.

Shanti' School
Harford, Connecticut

Public. Cooperative effort of six school districts in Greater Hartford

1 year as an alternative school.

50 students. 60% white; 30% black; 10% Latin. 60% urban; 40% suburbs.

A regional school without walls. Aimed at helping students to learn to live together and to use the community as its chief learning resource.

Walbrook High School
Baltimore, Maryland

Public. City-wide under open enrollment plan.

1 year as an alternative school.

2300 students. 100% black. Low income to middle income, urban.

Seeking to diversify its educational program through increasing courses available to students and permitting free choice among 10-week mini-course options. Increased community participation by parents in defining the school's emphases. Program focuses on students interested in communication.

Appendix B. Evaluation of Conference Format

The three days of the conference were organized as follows:

Sunday evening:	Participants arrived at Woodstock Conference and received information about other conference participants and schedule for for the first day of the conference.
Monday morning:	Large group orientation for all participants.
	Participants broke into small work groups to discuss specific experiences of individual decision-making in alternative schools. Part of the original intention was to rotate people through three small groups on the first day so they would get to know all participants. Participants wrote up their example of individual decision-making.
Monday noon:	Examples of individual decision-making were typed and duplicated.
Monday afternoon:	Participants used examples from the morning to develop generalizations about decision-making.
Monday evening:	Participants met in third work group to isolate important issues to be discussed at the conference and to select representatives to a steering committee.
	Steering committee met to develop an agenda for the next day consistent with conference objectives and the wishes of participants.
Tuesday morning:	Participants met in five work groups whose focus was suggested by the steering committee, including groups focusing on such questions as "What experiences or accomplishments should be required of all students?", "How do you develop norms or limts of behavior for staff and students?"
Tuesday afternoon:	Depending on the morning's experience, groups either continued to meet, regrouped to discuss other topics or broke up and wrote up their discussions and conclusions.
	Groups and individuals were strongly encouraged to write working papers representing group or individual ideas.

Tuesday evening: Specific discussion of the working papers prepared for the conference.

Wednesday morning: Discussion groups formed around topics suggested by participants, not necessarily directly related to decision-making (e.g. black students and alternative schools, political assumptions of alternative schools.)

Evaluation filled out by participants.

Wednesday afternoon: Initial summary of evaluations. Notes on all conference sessions passed out to participants. Final conference session.

Participants leave for home.

The evaluation forms filled out by conference participants consisted of nine questions to which short essay answers were requested. The following responses represent clear trends in this information:

Successful experiences: Two themes predominated in people's descriptions of successful experiences during the conference. First, people enjoyed discussions in which they talked in depth and with specific examples (10 responses). Most often this experience came in the work groups on the second day. For some, it came in the first day sessions in which a specific structure was set up for eliciting experiences. Second, people enjoyed discussions in which they participated in making what they felt were accurate generalizations about the different schools involved. (14 responses) They also enjoyed mulling these generalizations over and thinking (either by themselves or with others) about how they might apply these ideas to the strengthening of their own schools.

Unsuccessful experiences: The most frequently mentioned negative experience (9 responses) was the inability of the groups to push through systematically to generalizations based on their experiences. It was felt by these individuals that the conference should have stuck to a clear

theory-building design rather than responding to the desire of some participants to discuss various topics. The desire for more rigor came primarily from researchers and administrators. The second most frequently mentioned negative experience was a specific instance or instances in which the discussion was carried out at a very vague or abstract level with heavy use of educational jargon. This response came mainly from students.

Also mentioned 5 times as an unsuccessful experience was the evening discussion of the conference papers. People liked the papers and referred to them often in other conference discussions. Most people who cited the evening meeting as unsuccessful felt that it was merely a case of bad timing--that people were just too tired to deal with an evening discussion.

Other unsuccessful experiences mentioned at least twice were "too much pressure in too short a time," "groups were changed too often on the first day," and "students were often ignored in discussions."

Diversity of Participants: When asked to explain whether the diversity of the backgrounds of participants (especially role diversity of student, teacher, administrator, researcher) was a help or a hindrance, 13 responses felt it was a help, 5 a hindrance, and 6 both a hindrance and a help. Regardless of this initial judgment, however, many responses touched on similar themes. Diversity was a help sometimes because it did in fact bring a larger set of ideas and perspectives to bear on problems in many instances. Diversity was sometimes a hindrance because it multiplied the expectations people had of the conference and it often caused people to work at cross purposes.

The overall judgment seems to be that the diversity was good, but more effective ways should be developed for utilizing diversity as part of a total approach to analyzing an issue like decision-making. For example, perhaps researchers could develop a model for decision-

making that students could then react to, thereby allowing researcher to talk theoretically but still come down to earth after they had formulated their ideas.

Can schools learn from each other's experience? Every response indicated that people had observed significant common patterns in the development of alternative schools, and four responses indicated that this realization had been crystalized specifically at the conference. 16 responses indicated that participants had observed extremely similar common patterns between their schools. 11 responses indicated that while they saw some unique characteristics in particular schools, they saw common goals or common events recurring in many situations.

Three respondants who saw strong similarities between schools added that they still anticipated great difficulty in helping schools to learn from each other. Two expressed doubts that any report of conference results could be really helpful to another school. Another said that whatever the medium of communication, it had to hit another individual at just the right time to have any effect.

Was the pressure to focus on specific examples helpful? 12 responses indicated it was helpful, since it got people in the habit of talking concretely and communicating more effectively. 6 responses indicated it was not helpful, mainly because it provided people with an excuse to tell long stories of limited interest to others. 4 responses indicated that it wasn't helpful to focus on specific examples because they weren't put systematically into any kind of analytical framework. One suggestion was that examples could have focused on successful and unsuccessful instances of decision-making with an effort then made to decide why people failed in some instances and succeeded in others.

How should a future conference be set up? It was much more difficult to classify the responses to this question than to the others. 6 responses suggested giving up on the idea of

diverse work groups and bringing a group of people together who could follow through on a rigorous effort at building a model. Four responses recommended that more students be invited, and four others that the conference be made more diverse by bringing in broader political perspectives, more black and Latin schools. There were 12 other specific ideas, most of them suggesting modifications in conference format that would have helped the group reach generalization more easily or work more effectively.

Some Tentative conclusions: Out of the responses described above, it seems possible to draw two basic conclusions that should be of use to those planning similar meetings in the future:

1. After actually trying for three days to focus on a specific topic, cite specific examples related to it, and generalize from these examples, most participants felt that this type of direction was definitely a valuable one to pursue. Doubts about the process of working with specific examples and making generalizations resulted more from specific difficulties with the conference format (e.g. people had to move too much between groups the first day) than from a general dissatisfaction with the whole approach. As the evaluation response indicate, people left the conference with the feeling that they did have a good deal to learn from finding common patterns in each other's experiences and wanted to continue this process.
2. The thorniest issue at the conference was participant diversity, with some suggesting a less diverse group, some a more diverse group, and some a diverse group with more homogeneous subgroups for working on specific problems. Suggestions for dealing with this issue should be a high priority of planning for any subsequent conference.

Appendix C. Two Working Papers

Every conference member was involved in writing up some past experiences and perspectives on individual schools. Notes on the main points made in all meetings became part of the conference record. In addition, a number of participants wrote working papers at the conference that presented the ideas of work groups in which they were involved or presented personal perspectives that were stimulated by the conference discussions.

These records of the conference have been incorporated into the conference report, most without attempting the impossible task of crediting individuals. In the body of the report, several working papers prepared at the conference are quoted extensively. In this appendix, two additional working papers are reproduced in their entirety. They are presented because they illuminate clearly several of the key issues discussed in the three days at Woodstock.

"Student Selection as the Most Basic Issue"

Fritz Mulhauser

I would like to suggest a hearsay: that it is time to give up the dream of making the melting pot work inside alternative schools, when it has not worked in any other segment of society.

By melting pot, I mean the very basic idea we ought to bring into our schools, that we ought to seek out and welcome every sort of student (and non-student) that now exists in public school. Not only does it seem to me this idea is hard to support on educational grounds, but when we add to it the usual additional goal in our schools of "creating community"--we are at the farthest limits of our ability. We just don't know how to bring it off, and I would like to suggest that the struggle is more innervating, exhausting, and perhaps damaging, than the results justify.

Recommendation: That a new school consider with the utmost care its reasons for seeking a diverse student body. Why do we want "a mixture" of students? Because we find it more titillating to have some screw-offs among the grinds? Why do we want every ability level? Can we handle the demands that a diverse student body places on the teachers? Have we got staff that have even the slightest idea of what goes on the heads of of some of the sub-groups in the school?

Here is my analysis of some of the reasons for seeking out the "diversity" we have, and some of the consequences for both the institution and the individuals within it.

Initial conditions: A young and hopeful staff, angry at the wrongs of the current schools, and the wrongs of the society, resolves to change all that in a new setting. Their depth of discontent means many unusual and new ideas will be tried, and that outside threat will be high. Naturally, one would like as many allies and converts as possible. (I do not think that many schools really believe it when they say "We're just one alternative, for some kids." Secretly we wish the whole world was like us.) The combination of being against a lot of things, and needing validation of a risky stand on them, means that the founders of the new school will describe their hopes to potential students in many diverse ways--none very much bound by what is likely or possible. Often staff themselves need the approval of young people very badly and this is another pressure against narrow promises.

The result is that students of all sorts flock to the new school with as many motives and capacities as exist, each expecting the "better" school to solve his or her own special needs-academic, family, personal, economic, etc. The aura of a new and fresh start leads to high

expectations anyway. The desire to be more creative than the outworn schools means that staff will be very unclear about the boundaries of their competence: "Old so-and-so was a counselor back at X High School; I can do as well as he did." The new school's set of tasks expands and expands--fed by student hopes and staff dreams. Some of the mixture of student and staff goals are absolutely bound to conflict head-on, and the usual lag in developing group commitment to anything in particular means there will be an extended period of conflicting goals.

The effects? I see tremendous overextension of staff, in service of the multiple goals. There is usually a half-baked remedial reading program; some faltering attempts at "talking to" seriously disturbed individual kids" random institution of new courses, programs, etc.--without much more thought than the public-school Title III patchwork. I see inconsistency of staff, none realizing that someone else already tried to do that, or did it another way, or told a kid not to do it that way, etc.

The distrust of expertise that is endemic in new schools, will usually mean that people don't ask for help--or the disorganization of the school will mean that--for example--not all counselors get the training they need, or that only the English teachers share a more sensible marking/reporting system.

The effects on students? The fundamental fact of accepting every student who walks in, will mean-just as it does in public schools today--that some can be helped to grow and develop in interaction with staff and other students, and others cannot be much helped. The alternative may shift the group with which it is successful--as indeed many schools succeed with school-alienated white middle-class kids--but is it reasonable to expect the alternative to do better with all kids? Why do we ask that of ourselves? Because our hearts are pure, shall we be rewarded?

I believe that alternative schools are very unsettling for some students--just as are regular schools, and that the initial conditions I described above make it very difficult for staffs to admit that. We need support, and we know very well from our public school models that admitting institutional failure doesn't win friends and influence people. We need to be respected by students, or even liked, and kicking someone out of a school (suggesting he go elsewhere) ruins a relationship quickly. In the school I know best, staff had almost no effective response when a student got really mad; staff would just wilt, admit any personal failure or take any type of blame, to end the encounter.

Nor do I feel that the "unsettling" effect I mentioned is invariable growth-producing. Our alternative school environments are not a great deal more diverse within themselves than are public schools of today, I'd guess. They are different, but not more differentiated internally. Thus there aren't many alternative ways a student can survive within an alternative school--such as finding a sympathetic coach to relate to when one has failed in the classroom. Staffs attracted to new schools are younger, less personally secure, less willing to admit failures, etc--and as such are homogeneous (although different from regular school teachers).

The point of all this is that alternative school are going to be foxed by precisely the same issue that foxes the public schools we all deplore: trying to do too much for too many with too little. I start with student selection, since that is a policy variable we can control in many cases. I hope I don't give the impression that I mean just that alternatives should seek out the good kids, and let the rest go hang. But why not a more differentiated set of alternatives, each with some identity among its clientele and mission? Without such a differentiation, without saying "Here is the type of student this school will probably help, and with whom the staff can relate"--without that kind of honesty, I think alternative schools will go on making promises

they can't deliver. I prefer to deal with the student variable, because I doubt that one single institution can retain within it the diversity of staff (and their conflicting goals) needed to meet the fantastic range of kids that crowd the doors of the alternatives.

So would there be fewer kids served by the schools under my plan? Perhaps. But if I am right in believing that a good many within the present alternatives are not having valuable experiences, then we have recreated the public school situation. Having fewer, better-selected or self-selected students who are having more universal growth-producing experiences, would seem to me more desirable. Imposition on students of a staff desire to re-create community they find missing in their own lives seems both misguided and maybe unethical--in the sense that the effort will produce voluminous conflict, and we have (often) little reason to believe that our skills are adequate to handle it.

"hunches about Effective Decision-making"
Mike Lawler

If we had it to do over again, what would be done differently? What have we learned from the two and a half year history of the school? These questions have forced me to try to generalize in spite of my suspicion about generalizations.

After our morning discussion, I sat down and tried to put some notions down on paper. We talked about them some this afternoon, but they are not shared with the intention of being representative of our conversation. They simply suggest my own initial attempts to formulate some general hunches about decision-making. What I am looking for is a way of thinking which better prepares me to work on issues, crises, et. al. when they arise--a way of thinking as an organizer in alternative institutions which helps me anticipate developmental issues in the history of an organization.

Lately, I have been trying to state such notions to myself and talk with others about them, but express them as simple, declaratives. There are lots of qualifications and tentatives etc., but I have found it very difficult to get any further without almost overstating the point and then developing the qualifications.

Based upon the history of our development, I would suggest that:

1. Levels at which decisions are formulated and the composition of decision making groups should be more systematically matched with the nature of the ongoing policy areas faced by the members and the school.
2. The more an issue is perceived by the members to affect them or the school as a whole, the more important is the matter of the legitimacy of the decision-making group which formulates a response to the problem....Legitimacy is a broad term. It includes, for example, prior formal authorization to make a decision and emotional responses of members to the decision-making group before and during the decision-making process.
3. Individual and group "fantasy", e.g. paranoia, manipulation, exclusion and so forth, are diminished when decisions are time limited and the means of formulating those decisions are viewed as encouraging alterations or substantial overhauling....also when location of decision-making and accountability are spelled out precisely to everyone in advance.
4. The more goals become complex (and therefore the work), the more an institutional must face the issue of developing a more complex system of decision-making. It must also face the matter of meshing a more complex way of doing business with the nature of the goals and demands of doing the work....the means must match the expectations in a sense.

5. The more autonomous the institution the higher the priority can easily be given to internally determine goals and priorities.

6. The less autonomous the institution, the more the decision-making groups and apparatus or process must bear the strain of reconciling tensions between the agenda of the system (e.g. school, diocese, private agency) in which it exists and the agenda of the school itself; the decision-makers must not only decide but be able to take the heat off often conflicting agendas.

7. The more the school is "politically oriented" the more the decision-making people and system must resolve a tension between inclusion, process orientation, political learning and political skill development by kids and parents and the press to move rapidly in anoften chaotic political environment, seize opportunities when they arise, and be aggressive and effective in pursuit of political goals.

8. The more the school chooses to relate to external groups, powerful persons, agencies and the like-the more the decision-making must resolve the fact of skill differential between adults and between adults and kids with respect to dealing with these groups effectively in terms of the interests of the school.

9. The more successful a school becomes at encouraging participation in decision-making or power sharing or consultation--the greater the need to involve people in implementing the decisions in which they have participated....The more people are involved in implementation the more sophisticated they become in formulating policy in action terms...."OK we agree. Now who is going to do what and when, what is the strategy, who is most interested in what parts of making this go, who can best do this piece of the work?"

10. The more a decision affects the school as an institution, the more crucial it becomes to rely upon the formal, previously-agreed-upon ways of doing business....If the contract about how to decide or who is deciding is sidestepped by the infinite number of informal means, the school looses in the long haul....Accountability becomes murky: the weakness of the prior arrangements is often then overlooked and forgotten until the next time when "pragmatism" justifies sidestepping....Moving with what you have previously agreed to at least strengthens in some fashion the process of building a viable institution which stands somewhat apart, on its own, separate from personalities and informal ways of doing business.

11. The power to determine entrance to and termination from the school (teachers, staff, students) must be clearly stated from the onset....If the grounds for membership and the rights of membership are not set out clearly in advance, you get into a crisis and not only are you handling the issue....but the issue of "who has the right to influence the outcomes, who can be involved and in what ways and places" at the worst moment- when such questions are colored by peoples stakes in the crisis of the moment.

12. The more successful a school is in developing full participation by members, the more conflict will eventually arise around two themes: a. goal definition; b. allocation of scarce resources....At first this conflict will largely be among core adults, then it will shift to between conflict between core adults and students, and then if teachers become an effective, cohesive, thinking and proposing group it will shift to between students and teachers with decision-making groups playing the role of arbitration....

13. The more complex the work or the goals, the more important it is to have a strong lower level of decision-making which makes access and feedback more likely than say

with a governance body....Also the more important it becomes (if the group is to effectively pursue its goals) for the decision-making groups at various levels to work out areas of action or spheres of decision-making and some mechanism (overlapping membership of something) for providing continuity to some exrent between the decision making groups....It is easy to develop an effective governance body. It is more difficult but in the long run more important to develop those decision making groups which make shorter term decisions and function at a different level of policy making.

14. The more complex the goals and work, the more likely it is for the decision-making groups or process to have difficulty setting priorities. Further, the priorities will in many instances be either exclusive of competing in terms of scarce energy and resources and skills....This results in a fuse getting blown, frustration builds, life in the school gets very rough....It is better to not do some things and set priorities to do others.

15. The greater the degree of goal complexity or the more kids grow the more demanding they become, the more the school is successful in its own terms--it is growing, people within it are growing and succeeding--And the more the decision-making groups and persons will face the issue of standards, professionalism, inter-personal difficulties arising from increasing expectations which cannot be met immediately.

16. The more dependent the school is upon external sources for funding, the more the "top" governance group will face the issues of resolving tensions--conflicts between what sells, who supports what, and the rest of what you want to do which is without support....The process of funding is viewed as involving "distortion" by ommission or emphasis of the interns; priorities of school members....As a result, more tension

will occur between those formally responsible for making such tough decisions and the members generally....Maybe the tensions cannot be avoided, but they can be anticipated by those who must decide and plan for.

17. The more the "top" governance body includes persons not directly involved in the school...the more likely it is that the issue of "you are not close to the situation" will arise....

18. Continued growth after initial history of the school is dependent primarily upon the extent to which the means of governance and those active in that process can anticipate the future....What issues are we likely to face....The planning capacities of decision making groups becomes as important or possibly more important that the arbitration function or the resolution of more immediate issues.

19. When the school is undergoing an expansion or is faced with the opportunity or need of developing additional resources external to itself, decision making faces the problem of goal conflict between allocation of resources for strengthening present learning resources or allocation to obtain a potential future benefit.